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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 1133
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY 0528
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/USCENTCOM POLITICAL ADVISOR MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
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STATE FOR SCA/CEN
TRANSCOM FOR K JOHNSON-CASARES
CENTCOM FOR M GFOELLER
FROM AMBASSADOR NORLAND

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/30/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [UZ](#)
SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: SERIOUS PROSPECTS FOR TRANSIT TO
SUPPORT U.S. FORCES IN AFGHANISTAN

REF: A. TASHKENT 1127
[1](#)B. TASHKENT 1124

Classified By: P-E Chief Nicholas Berliner for reasons 1.4 b & d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: A delegation from U.S. Transportation Command (TRANSCOM) and U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) led by TRANSCOM Rear Admiral (RADM) Mark Harnitchek and CENTCOM Brigadier General (BG) Peter Lennon visited Uzbekistan October 21 - 24 to explore options for transit of supplies to Coalition forces operating in Afghanistan. The Government of Uzbekistan (GOU) offered considerable support to the delegation, facilitating travel to a commercial air cargo facility under development in the southwestern city of Navoi, as well as to rail facilities in Termez on the Afghan border. The delegation also met with members of the American Chamber of Commerce in Tashkent (AMCHAM), as well as Uzbek companies interested in the possibility of becoming suppliers. The GOU appears to be motivated not only by the possible security and economic benefits that could accrue from expansion of a Northern Ground Line of Communication (NGLOC) through Uzbekistan, but also by what it perceives as an opportunity to strengthen relations with the United States. The TRANSCOM/CENTCOM visit has clearly raised expectations in Tashkent, both within the GOU and in the business community. As we look to next steps, it will be essential to be able to communicate clearly on the likely scope of NGLOC in terms of what we want and what it will mean for Uzbekistan. Recent conversations with GOU officials have also revealed that the Uzbek side believes any expansion of supply lines through Uzbekistan will necessitate an inter-governmental agreement. If we are interested, the planned Nov. 19 visit by TRANSCOM Commanding General should be used to convey a specific proposal to the GOU. End Summary.

GOU Rolls Out Red Carpet for NGLOC Team

[1](#)2. (C) Although Uzbek Foreign Minister Norov had indicated prior to the TRANSCOM/CENTCOM visit that we should approach transit in a "step-by-step" fashion, the GOU pulled out all

the stops to welcome RADM Harnitchek, BG Lennon and their team. The delegation was met on arrival in Tashkent by Deputy Defense Minister Niyazov, the Chairman of Uzbekistan Airways Valery Tyan and the Chairman of Uzbek Railways Achilbay Ramatov and flown on an Uzbekistan Airways plane provided for the entire first day of the visit. The degree to which the GOU helped facilitate the visit reveals their strong interest in this initiative, both economically and politically.

Navoi: Karimov's Desert Dream

¶3. (C) The delegation's first stop was the Navoi Airport southwest of Tashkent. The GOU has partnered with Korean Airlines (KAL) in an effort to develop Navoi, a former Soviet bomber base, into a trans-continental commercial air cargo hub. Although still under development, Navoi has substantial capacity to accommodate the largest aircraft and, with the near-term completion of its cargo handling facilities, move substantial volumes of cargo. Uzbekistan Railways is also nearing completion of a rail spur that would link the airport to the rail line running to Termez on the Afghan border. Navoi is purported to be a pet project of Uzbek President Karimov and part of a vision of bringing economic development to an isolated and impoverished region of the country. Clearly, both the GOU and KAL have made substantial investments in the facility that are in need of a return greater than that provided by the three KAL cargo flights and handful of passenger flights landing in Navoi every week. Use of Navoi for part of NGLOC is a major incentive for the GOU - at the time of the delegation's visit of more than 3

hours, no other aircraft was on the tarmac or touched down on the airport's 4,000 meter runway.

Termez: Gateway to Afghanistan

¶4. (C) The southernmost city in Uzbekistan, Termez provides the principle road and rail connection between Uzbekistan and Northern Afghanistan. Arriving at Termez airport (which is significantly less developed and less capable than Navoi, despite the small German military presence there), the delegation was taken to the rail yards that serve for inspection of cargo and rolling stock entering and leaving Afghanistan. In a heavily fortified area protected by numerous check points, guard posts and an electrified fence that runs the entire length of Uzbekistan's border with Afghanistan, Uzbek Railways chairman Ramatov explained how goods move to Afghanistan. Termez is the route through which more than sixty percent of aviation fuel currently used by forces in Afghanistan passes, which ensures an already steady flow of traffic across the border. Ramatov assured the delegation that the facility could easily accommodate increased freight volumes and also work in conjunction with Navoi.

Business Community Interested

¶5. (C) The delegation spent two days in Tashkent meeting with members of the AMCHAM as well as local Uzbek business owners who were interested in the possibility that NGLOC could include local procurement. The level of development of these companies reflected the general unevenness of business development in Uzbekistan; some are capable of meeting a challenge such as this and others are not. The team also received very frank assessments on the difficulties of doing business in Uzbekistan and with Uzbek partners. Corruption remains endemic throughout all levels of the economy and government in what often amounts to a public-private partnership for graft. Nevertheless, the high degree of interest in NGLOC underscores the economic and political benefits that the GOU perceives and would likely provide some countervailing pressure against the baser instincts of local 'biznesmeni.'

Next Steps: Expectation Management

¶6. (C) Going forward, it is going to be essential to manage

expectations and communicate clearly to the Uzbeks our vision for the NGLOC. Given the personal involvement of President Karimov in the Navoi Airport project and investments already made there, the Uzbek side is clearly hoping that part of NGLOC will include use of that facility. This does not mean any negotiations would be easy. Local purchase and its economic benefits is another factor that they will likely look at very closely and the TRANSCOM/CENTCOM visit has raised expectations in this regard. (Note: We have heard that there was considerable disappointment that there was not more local purchase during U.S. use of the air base at Karshi-Khanabad - K2. The Uzbeks even harbor hopes that "local purchase" could encompass the use of Uzbek contractors to carry out reconstruction in Afghanistan.)

17. (C) Although they understand its commercial nature, the Uzbeks clearly perceive NGLOC as more than simply an expansion of commercial shipping volumes into Afghanistan through Uzbekistan. Conversations with Uzbek officials subsequent to the visit have shown that the GOU believes this will be a negotiated agreement on transit between the GOU and the USG similar to what the GOU and NATO are currently negotiating (Ref B). In part, this stems from the fact that much of Uzbekistan's economy is under state control so that "commercial" in Uzbekistan is largely an issue of semantics.

More importantly, however, expectation of an agreement is an indication of the political significance the GOU attaches to this issue. Cooperation on transit has greater significance here than simply moving supplies to Afghanistan; for Uzbekistan it would mean coming in from the cold. Engaging the GOU on transit is, for the Uzbeks, a signal that the U.S. wants them as partners at a time when Russian behavior in the region has underscored the imperative of Uzbekistan achieving balance in its foreign relations.

18. (C) The Uzbeks may be tempted to believe that the U.S. will downplay human rights concerns as part of an agreement on NGLOC. We should disabuse them of this notion. As we have over the past year, U.S. diplomacy will need to continue to seek effective ways to press Uzbekistan to punish those who commit human rights abuses and to speed up democratic reform. An "effective" approach means maximizing diplomatic engagement and minimizing loss of face to the GOU as we pursue creative, relevant ways of advancing our human rights agenda in Uzbekistan and Central Asia.

19. (C) In anticipation of the visit to Uzbekistan by TRANSCOM General McNabb, we should be prepared to communicate to the GOU the outlines of what NGLOC would mean here - what use we might make of Navoi; whether or not we will use rail transit; what the potential of local purchase is and what types of goods and services that would encompass. On that basis, we can also explore what type of agreement might be necessary and assess the difficulty of attaining it. Although the Uzbeks appear eager, they also clearly believe that we need them as partners. We should expect that they will try to drive a hard bargain on this issue, and should be ready for intensive negotiations to achieve any goals we set for ourselves with respect to an Uzbek role in transit to Afghanistan.

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